

Traces of Oblivion_Ole Lützow-Holm_Reflection

Traces of Oblivion for 11-stringed alto guitar materializes as a kaleidoscopic, incomplete outcome of extensive dialogues with the guitarist and researcher Stefan Östersjö. Through practical as well as conceptual elaborations we explored endless procedures inspired by the instrument's characteristics with regard to timbre and architectural design. Gradually, two particular aspects came to play a significant role: On the one hand a construction feature of the alto guitar with five scale-tuned strings in the bass followed by six chord strings (simultaneously proposing, as it were, historical resonance *and* unbiased experimentation) and, on the other, a scordatura whose micro-tonal deviations constitute the acoustic habitat of the music. The core organizing principle is made up of carefully chiseled gestures, some of which are recorded sound files layered in loops and activated in the course of the performance as an archive – memory and oscillation at the same time. Moving through transient, winding passages and circular patterns, it is as if *Traces of Oblivion* evoked images related to a sense of loss.

In his essay *The Death of the Author* from 1967, Roland Barthes, reflecting on the act of reading, proposes a strategy where one's attentive empathy connects with the shared discourse that the literary work generates over time as a result of a continuous sedimentation of contradictory meaning and understanding – rather than with the biographical imprint of the author. Barthes rejects the idea of a finite message of the work and what he calls the *tyranny of literary critique*.

A couple of years earlier, Susan Sontag draws a similar conclusion in her essay *Against interpretation*. There, distancing herself from what might be labelled the sickness of speculative pursuit of content and biased over-interpretation by critics, Sontag is encouraging us to let the work *work* and to sharpen our recognition of how it appears and *does whatever it does*. She opposes hermeneutic strategies and finishes with the notorious appeal: *In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art*.

In Julia Kristeva's pioneering text, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, it is primarily the exposition of the concepts *genotext* and *phenotext* that interests me. Furthermore, her ideas about *rupture* and *Mimesis* are indeed persuasive with regard to a different musical awareness, as well as how Kristeva defines *feminine* as every single action that undermines the authoritarian *masculine* discourse – in other words: that which excites freedom. Finally, the temporalities attributed to her theory of the *semiotics* – the being before language – are so close to music.

Departing from these rudimentary meditations and inspired by another essay by Barthes, *From Work to Text*, I have considered various possibilities of thinking about musical composition in terms of a *rhizomatic archive*. By that I mean a place, rather than a narrative – a process, rather than an artifact. Barthes makes a distinction between *work* and *text*, suggesting that the work refers to the physical object – the book, the canvas, the score – and the text to the accumulated layers of significance, interpretations and discourses contained within the work.

I set out to conceive of a non-linear music, the accomplishment of which was founded on the image of exploring a terrain, choosing at any given moment one's path through a topology of constituent, very distinct elements that occupy a strong identity. Another important property was the notion of *ambiguity* – of unfinishedness, uncertainty and doubt – and of being *in between*. I wanted to investigate the potential of a musical *text* that never winds up.